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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
09/460,361	12/13/1999	AKIRA UTSUMI		2392

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EXAMINER

COLE, ELIZABETH M

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
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1771

DATE MAILED: 08/05/2004

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

09/460,361

Applicant(s)

UTSUMI, AKIRA

Examiner

Elizabeth M. Cole

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-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --
Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If the period for reply specified above is less than thirty (30) days, a reply within the statutory minimum of thirty (30) days will be considered timely.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133).
- Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☐ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 5/24/04
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☐ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-3, 6-12, 15- 31 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-3, 6-12, 15- 31 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
- Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
- 11) ☐ The proposed drawing correction filed on _____ is: a) ☐ approved b) ☐ disapproved by the Examiner.
- If approved, corrected drawings are required in reply to this Office action.
- 12) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. §§ 119 and 120

- 13) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
1. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).
- * See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.
- 14) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for domestic priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) (to a provisional application).
- a) ☐ The translation of the foreign language provisional application has been received.
- 15) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for domestic priority under 35 U.S.C. §§ 120 and/or 121.

Attachment(s)

- 1) ☒ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- 2) ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- 3) ☐ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449) Paper No(s) _____
- 4) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413) Paper No(s) _____
- 5) ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152)
- 6) ☐ Other: _____

1. Claim 30 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. In claim 30, it is not clear what is meant by area density. Generally density is described in terms of weight per unit volume, not unit area. Does this mean basis weight of the fabric?

2. The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

3. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

4. Claims 1-2, 6-12, 15-18, 20, 22-26, 31 rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as anticipated by or, in the alternative, under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as obvious over Ohigashi, U.S. Patent No. 4,594,283. Ohigashi discloses a two layered molded material wherein one web has an apparent density lower than 0.4 g/cc and the other web has an apparent density higher than 0.3 g/cc and wherein the difference in apparent density of the two webs is 0.1 g/cc or more which

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encompasses the claimed difference of no more than 0.14 g/cc. The rigid layer would correspond to the layer having the higher apparent density and the bulky layer would correspond to the layer having the lower apparent density. See abstract. The two layered webs may comprise nonwoven fabrics. Each layer may comprise binder fibers. The layers may comprise hollow polyester fibers. The layers are needled together. See example 1. The material may be molded. The limitation that the laminate comprises an automotive trim panel has not been given patentable weight because it occurs in the preamble of the claim and because it amounts to a statement of intended use. Although the reference does not disclose the average longitudinal tensile strength and transverse tensile strength is not less than 15/N/50mm width and the average of the longitudinal tensile strength and the transverse tensile strength of the entanglement-based nonwoven fabric is higher than that of the merely-entangled nonwoven fabric, however, Ohigashi discloses the same types of fibers, the same apparent density ratio, etc., and therefore, it is reasonable to presume that the Ohigashi laminate would have the same properties as the claimed laminate. When the reference discloses all the limitations of a claim except a property or function, and the examiner cannot determine whether or not the reference inherently possesses properties which anticipate or render obvious the claimed invention but has basis for shifting the burden of proof to applicant as in *In re Fitzgerald*, 619 F.2d 67, 205 USPQ 594 (CCPA 1980). See MPEP § 2112- 2112.02. Further with regard to claim 31, Ohigashi discloses a mechanically entangled fabric. Ohigashi does not disclose water jet needling. However, product by process claims are not limited to the manipulations of the recited steps, only the structure implied by the steps. "Even though product - by process claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a

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product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product - by - process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process." In re Thorpe , 227 USPQ 964, 966 (Fed. Cir. 1985).

Once the Examiner provides a rationale tending to show that the claimed product appears to be the same or similar to that of the prior art, although produced by a different process, the burden shifts to applicant to come forward with evidence establishing an unobvious difference between the claimed product and the prior art product. In re Marosi, 218 USPQ 289, 292 (Fed. Cir. 1983).

The use of 35 USC 102/103 rejections for product by process claim has been approved by the courts. "[T]he lack of physical description in a product - by - process claim makes determination of the patentability of the claim more difficult, since in spite of the fact that the claim may recite only process limitations, it is the patentability of the product claimed and not of the recited process steps which must be established. We are therefore of the opinion that when the prior art discloses a product which reasonably appears to be either identical with or only slightly different than a product claimed in a product - by - process claim, a rejection based alternatively on either section 102 or section 103 of the statute is eminently fair and acceptable. As a practical matter, the Patent Office is not equipped to manufacture products by the myriad of processes put before it and then obtain prior art products and make physical comparisons therewith." In re Brown , 173 USPQ 685, 688 (CCPA 1972).

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5. Claims 3, 19, 21, 28-30 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Ohigashi, U.S. Patent No. 4,594,283. Ohigashi discloses a two layered molded material wherein one web has an apparent density lower than 0.4 g/cc and the other web has an apparent density higher than 0.3 g/cc and wherein the difference in apparent density of the two webs is 0.1 g/cc or more which encompasses the claimed difference of no more than 0.14 g/cc. The rigid layer would correspond to the layer having the higher apparent density and the bulky layer would correspond to the layer having the lower apparent density. See abstract. The two layered webs may comprise nonwoven fabrics. Each layer may comprise binder fibers. The layers may comprise hollow polyester fibers. The layers are needled together. See example 1. The material may be molded. The limitation that the laminate comprises an automotive trim panel has not been given patentable weight because it occurs in the preamble of the claim and because it amounts to a statement of intended use. Ohigashi differs from the claimed invention because it does not specifically set forth the claimed thicknesses of the layers. However, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to have selected suitable thicknesses for the layers through the process of routine experimentation motivated by the expectation that particular thicknesses of the layers would be suitable depending upon the strength desired, the size of the area in which the laminate would be used, the types of fibers employed, etc.

6. Applicant's arguments have been fully considered but are moot in view of the new grounds of rejection.


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Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Elizabeth M. Cole whose telephone number is (571) 272-1475. The examiner may be reached between 6:30 AM and 6:00 PM Monday through Wednesday, and 6:30 AM and 2 PM on Thursday.

Mr. Terrel Morris, the examiner's supervisor, may be reached at (571) 272-1478.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free).

The fax number for all official faxes is (703) 872-9306.



Elizabeth M. Cole
Primary Examiner
Art Unit 1771

e.m.c